

Bath & North East Somerset Council

MEETING/ DECISION MAKER:	Cllr Paul May, Cabinet Member for Children’s Services	
DECISION DATE:	On or after 13th December 2025	EXECUTIVE FORWARD PLAN REFERENCE:
		E 3675
TITLE:	New Special School with Collocated Children’s Homes	
WARD:	Keynsham North	
AN OPEN PUBLIC ITEM		
This decision is being taken as an urgent item under Rule 3.5.15 of the Constitution (General Exception) and will therefore not be subject to call-in.		
List of attachments to this report:		
Appendix 1 - Charlton House Risk Register		

1 THE ISSUE

- 1.1 A previous Single Member Decision in September 2024 (E 3562) agreed the following: *The Cabinet Member agrees that Charlton House, Keynsham can be re-purposed into a small residential and day school for young people aged 11-17 with complex special education needs and fully approves £6.1m High Needs Provision Capital Allocation (HNPCA) Grant funding to carry out the remodelling to accommodate the young people at the new special school.*
- 1.2 The proposal for the special school element remains the same (although the age range will be 11-18). However, we concluded that the original plan of a ‘residential school’ for 12 pupils does not best meet the needs of our most complex children. This would be better provided by two, collocated children’s homes. Each will offer residential care for up to 4 children/young people. This represents an exciting development, opening our own children’s homes, in B&NES for B&NES children.
- 1.3 In order to meet the Ofsted regulatory requirements for the design and amenities in children’s homes, the costs for the project have increased by £660k to £6.760m.

2 RECOMMENDATION

The Cabinet Member is asked to;

- 2.1 Approve the amended proposal that Charlton House, Keynsham should continue to be re-purposed into a special school for 30 day-pupils with highly complex needs, but with a 52-week residential offer for 8 CYP in total being provided by two, colocated children's homes
- 2.2 Fully approve an increase of £660k to £6.760m funded by borrowing.

3 THE REPORT

3.1 Rationale

The Single Member Decision in September 2024 proposed that Charlton House, Keynsham, could be re-purposed into a small residential and day school for young people aged 11-17 with complex special education needs (12 residential and 18 day pupils, 30 in total).

£6.1m High Needs Provision Capital Allocation (HNPCA) Grant funding was approved to carry out the remodelling to accommodate the young people at the new special school. This proposal was based on opening our own provision and commissioning a Multi-Academy Trust (MAT) to run it as a day and residential special school.

Following limited engagement from the market, withdrawal of the single tender submission (due to concerns around the MAT running a residential school) and acknowledgement that the need is for 52-week residential provision; it was decided to investigate if the residential element at Charlton could operate as a separately run children's home.

A telephone call and follow up meeting with the lead Ofsted Regulatory Inspection Managers for the South-West, Paula Lahey and Polly So confirmed that it would be possible to have a children's home in the same building as a school (it is proposed that this would be located on the top floor of Charlton House).

A 12-bed children's home would not be deemed suitable by Ofsted. The proposed accommodation area on the top floor of the building should be divided into two entirely self-contained homes, each for 4 CYP with separate entrances and gardens allowing access independent from the school.

The capital project will include works to ensure that Charlton House and Hawthorn Court have separate access, security and landscaping to outside areas. It has been agreed with Adult Social Care that they will retain use of the kitchen in Charlton House (which will have a secure boundary with the school) so that meals can continue to be provided to Hawthorne Court and to the new school.

Consultation with our parents and carers has highlighted the priority of bringing children closer to home and to their families. Many of the children in the residential homes will continue to have close contact and relationships with their families. By providing these homes in the local area, parents/carers can remain fully involved in all aspects of their child's care for example attending all medical appointments, meetings in person etc.

Charlton House is also a five-minute walk away from the social care teams based at Keynsham. It is adjacent to a range of local amenities and activities allowing opportunities for socialisation and for engagement with the wider community. All of which will improve safety and wellbeing of the children and young people and enhance preparation for adulthood.

The project team for Charlton includes our Communications Team as there is a positive story to be communicated around how opening our first children's homes in B&NES aligns with our wider strategy for our most vulnerable CYP and adults, including the Englishcombe Lane project in development by Adult Social Care.

3.2 Running the Provision

The special school and homes will be run completely independently but will need to work closely with each other. We held a well-attended Market Engagement Event on 23rd of October 2025 for potential providers of both the school and children's homes. Appointing each provider for the school and children's homes will require two separate processes

1. The Department of Education (D of E) process to open a Free School via the presumption route for a single or multi-academy trust to run the special school <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/establishing-a-new-school-free-school-presumption> We are working closely with the Regions Group regarding the presumption process and have already published our specification and timeline. The deadline to submit applications is the 5th of January 2026 with the aim of achieving D of E approval of a provider by May 2026. <https://www.bathnes.gov.uk/if-youre-proposer>
<https://www.bathnes.gov.uk/plan-and-timeline>
2. A competitive tendering process to appoint a strategic partner to work with the Local Authority to run the children's homes is also underway. Following the initial market engagement event, we have a number of engagement events planned as part of a competitive dialogue process, this includes a workshop on the 9th of December. The procurement timetable will run for 9 months with the successful provider appointed in July 2026.

4 STATUTORY CONSIDERATIONS

- 4.1 This provision is required in order to deliver savings in relation to the Safety Valve.
- 4.2 Under section 14 of the Education Act 1996, Local Authorities have a statutory duty to ensure that special educational provision is made for pupils who have special educational needs (SEND). The Council's priorities are set out in the SEND Education Strategy and Action Plan 2021-2024 in relation to increasing the local provision for children and young people with SEND. The council are committed to delivering local education SEND placement sufficiency and reduce unsustainable costs driven by out of county placements and travel.
- 4.3 Children with disabilities are considered Children in Need under section 17 Children Act 1989. This means that the local authorities have a duty to provide services to meet their needs. These services may include financial support and accommodation.

4.4 This decision is being taken as an urgent item under Rule 3.5.15 of the Constitution (General Exception). The original opening date of September 2026 had to be delayed and, to open in September 2027, (critical if we are to move children into the school/homes at the beginning of the academic year), the increased budget needs to be approved before Christmas. This would allow enough time to appoint the design and build team and to have the contractors onsite for June 2026 which would be the very latest if we are to complete by September 2027.

5 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS (FINANCE, PROPERTY, PEOPLE)

5.1 Capital

The £6.1m High Needs Provisional Capital Allocation (HNPCA) Grant to carry out the remodelling to accommodate the young people at the new special school has already been agreed.

The required remodelling and adaptations to Charlton House to enable the building to meet the Ofsted regulatory requirements for children's homes has led to an increase in the budget of £660k.

This can be funded by borrowing from Children's Social Care savings from the reduced residential costs.

5.2 Revenue

School

The running costs of the school will be handed over to the Academy Trust who has been chosen via the presumption process. The expectation being that they will be funded on the special school rates of £10k per pupil with the additional top up funding from the banding system which will be at the highest level of band 6, or in some cases at a bespoke level to meet particularly complex needs.

The project will reduce the overspend in the DSG and increase the local offer, preventing expensive out-of-county placements. Our safety valve plan states we expect savings of **£840k** from Charlton based on the current independent average school cost of £88k per annum and an anticipated average education cost at Charlton of £60k.

Additionally, the transport savings would be approx. £15k per child, so £450k, but we are likely to need some transport locally -minibuses etc for group travel so estimated at **£350k**

Children's Homes

The original SMD calculated potential savings from 12 pupils accessing residential school places at Charlton House, compared to the average cost charged by independent residential schools. Following acknowledgement that the residential school option is not appropriate, these savings have been updated.

The revised potential savings reflect the smaller cohort of children supported and the complexity of needs the children will present with. For our children with complex SEND needs who are looked after in residential settings, the severity and range of needs and associated costs vary over time.

For this updated report, we have identified a cohort of children/young people with autism and complex needs who are currently in care and closely align with the likely cohort of this

new residential provision. Based on these most up to date costs, the average annual cost is **£407k**. This is more conservative estimate than when we carried out this exercise in June 2025, the 5 most recent placements at that time gave an average annual cost of **£643k**.

This variation in average costs reflects variation in the specific needs of the individual young people at different points in time; for example, additional staffing, waking nights, bed blocking etc.

In addition to this naturally occurring variation, we have yet to complete the tendering process to establish a placement base rate, and it is also sensible to consider possible occupancy scenarios.

In our early engagement with local providers, two have given us (confidential) estimates of the annual cost per child for each of the children's homes. Whilst these costs are only estimates and we have yet to complete the tendering process, including the final costs, they do allow benchmarking against our most current average, annual costs (£407k).

This at present, dependant on occupancy, gives indicative savings of between **£229k and £756k**, sufficient to repayable borrowing of **£53k** per annum.

6 RISK MANAGEMENT

6.1 A risk assessment related to the issue and recommendations has been undertaken, in compliance with the Council's decision-making risk management guidance.

6.2 Key risks are identified as:

6.2.1 Should Charlton House project not go ahead – failure to identify other options to locate the special school and residential accommodation.

6.2.2 The Council not fulfilling part of the agreement conditions in the Safety Valve plan.

7 EQUALITIES

7.1 An Equalities Impact assessment (EQIA) has been undertaken.

<https://www.bathnes.gov.uk/sites/default/files/Charlton%20House%20Equality%20impact%20assessment%20and%20equality%20analysis.pdf>

8 CLIMATE CHANGE

8.1 The heating to Charlton House is provided by a newly installed Air Source Heat Pump System which replaced gas-fired boilers. The building has roof mounted PV panels

8.2 By remodelling an existing building there will be minimal ecological impact.

9 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

9.1 Other options would be to look for an alternative site, this would:

- Delay the opening of the school – implications for the Safety Valve savings.

- May have project cost implications.
- Would mean that Charlton House will stand empty.

10 CONSULTATION

10.1 A full public consultation was held on the closure of the care home with the remit of opening the school. Adult Social Care lead the consultation process. The following is the link to the outcome of the consultation:

<https://democracy.bathnes.gov.uk/documents/s80420/E3513%20-%20Appendix%201%20-%20Community%20Resource%20Centres%20Consultation%20Report.pdf>

10.2 The following consultation events to share the updated plans for Charlton are planned

- 24th November 2025– project website and online consultation to go live for a period of 4 weeks. <https://www.bathnes.gov.uk/charlton-house-homes-and-special-school>
- 5th December 2025– stakeholder consultation event – in Charlton House
- 12th December 2025– public exhibition (with paper feedback forms)– in Charlton House
- 19th December 2025– consultation draws to a close
- Team will then consider feedback and make any possible amendments to the design in response to the consultation ahead of a planning application which will be lodged in January 2026.

Contact person	Olwyn Donnelly – Head of Education Commissioning Tel: 01225 477120
Background papers	https://democracy.bathnes.gov.uk/mgIssueHistoryHome.aspx?IId=39543&PlanId=964&RPID=108160396.aspx
Please contact the report author if you need to access this report in an alternative format	